

PHILIP ROTH, PRINCE OF ASTURIAS AWARD FOR LITERATURE

Last June 6th the 2012 Prince of Asturias Award for Literature was bestowed upon Philip Roth by majority vote. The Prince of Asturias Awards—established on 24 September 1980 by the Prince of Asturias, heir to the throne of Spain, and granted at the Campoamor Theater in Oviedo (Asturias, north of Spain) every fall—are a series of annual prizes given in this country by the Prince of Asturias Foundation to individuals, organizations and entities from around the world that make remarkable contributions to several disciplines such as sciences, humanities and sports. These awards, aimed to “consolidate links between the Principality and the Prince of Asturias, and to contribute to encouraging and promoting scientific, cultural and humanistic values that form part of mankind’s universal heritage”, are divided into 8 categories: Arts, Social Sciences, Communication and Humanities, Technical & Scientific Research, International Cooperation, Sports, Concord and Literature. (For further information, please visit <http://www.fpa.es/en/awards/2012/philip-roth-1/>)

In the field of Literature, these awards, Spain’s equivalent to the Nobel Prizes, have been granted to many fine writers throughout their 30 plus years of existence. The prize has been awarded to writers in Spanish like Spanish poets José Hierro (1981) and Ángel González (1985); Spanish novelists Miguel Delibes and Gonzalo Torrente Ballester (1982); Colombian poet Álvaro Mutis (1997); Mexican novelist Juan Rulfo (1983) and Guatemalan short story writer Augusto Monterroso (2000). In addition, the prize has also gone to writers outside the Spanish-speaking world like Israeli novelist and essayist Amos Oz (2007); Canadian novelist Margaret Atwood (2008); US playwright Arthur Miller (2002) and US novelist Paul Auster (2006).

For the record it is interesting to note that Peruvian-Spanish novelist Mario Vargas Llosa, Spanish novelist Camilo José Cela and British novelist Doris Lessing received the Prince of Asturias Award (1986, 1987 and 2001, respectively) and the Nobel Prize afterwards (2010, 1989 and 2007, respectively). Among the writers who have received the Spanish Award but never got the Nobel Prize is Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes, who was granted the Prince of Asturias Award in 1994. Philip Roth, who expressed his joy at winning the prize, dedicated a significant part of his moving statement to remembering his dear fellow writer and friend.

I am delighted to receive the Prince of Asturias Award and thrilled that the jury should have found my work worthy of such an honor. It is particularly poignant for me to have gotten news of the award only a few weeks after the death of Carlos Fuentes, who received the award in 1994. Carlos was a dear friend of mine and a generous colleague for many decades and, of course, he was among the greatest novelists writing in Spanish in our era. I wish he were alive so that I could hear his mellifluous voice at the other end of the phone offering me congratulations in his courtly way.

Philip Roth

New York, 6th June 2012

Roth’s nomination for the Prince of Asturias Award was proposed by Michael Göring, Chairman of the Board of the ZEIT-Ebelin and Gerd Bucerius Foundation (Germany). In a book edited by Benjamin Taylor entitled *Saul Bellow: Letters* (New York: Viking, 2010), one learns that in the year 2000 Saul Bellow, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976, sent a letter to the Swedish Academy in which he “wish [ed] to nominate the American novelist Philip Roth for the Nobel Prize. His books have been so widely examined and praised that it would be superfluous for me to describe, or praise, his gifts” (p.546). Who can think of a better nominator and nominee?

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